

"Thank you Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

"It's an honor to be here tonight to speak out for women across America who rely on contraception for their health and well-being

"I want to emphasis the word health, because at its heart, that's what this debate is about.

"There's been a great deal of discussion about religion in this debate. But we want to use tonight to remind policymakers and Americans everywhere what's really at stake when we talk about contraception, and that's the health and well-being of millions of women and their families.

"99 percent of sexually active women have used contraception, including 98 percent of sexually active Catholic women. More than half of women between the ages of 18 and 34 have struggled to afford contraception. It's also important to recognize 28 states already require contraceptive coverage. And 57 percent of Catholic voters support the new policy requiring contraception coverage.

"But today we want to move beyond statistics and tell human stories: The stories of women all across America who rely on contraception for a variety of vital health needs.

"Tonight I want to share just one of many stories I have received from women in my district.

"The story I want to share is from a young women in my district in Chicago named Annalisa. Annalisa was so moved by the story of the young women from Georgetown who was denied contraception to treat her ovarian cyst, she wrote me this letter. Quote:

"I would like to applaud your decision to walk out of the one-sided talk about birth control coverage. I have a similar story to that of the rejected witness' friend.

"I had my right ovary removed shortly after I turned 18 due to a large cyst that not only threatened my fertility, but I was told if it grew any larger it could burst and also threaten my life. My left ovary also had multiple smaller cysts, but they were able to be removed while leaving the ovary intact. My doctor said I was one of the youngest with such a problem, and the cyst was so large it was sent to be researched.

"Before I was even sexually active I was prescribed birth control pills to preserve my remaining ovary and to take my fertility beyond the age of 18.

"It saddens me to no end that some people don't understand the many uses and life-saving abilities of birth control. I hope to be a mother someday, she writes, a darned good one, and I thank you for standing up for women like me," end of quote

"Well, I want to thank Annalisa for her bravery in sharing her story with me, and allowing me to share it tonight.

"But Annalisa is not alone.

"Her story is the story of thousands of women around the country whose health relies on contraception. We will hear more stories like Annalisa's tonight,

"But I hope next time we engage in a debate about restricting access to contraception, we remember Annalisa and women like her, and we remember that for thousands of women,

contraception is not a question of religion, but a question of life and death.

"In addition to non-contraception health benefits, the *contraception* benefits of birth control cannot be under-stated. The simple fact is: millions of women use birth control to delay or avoid pregnancy.

"According to the American College of Obstetricians Gynecologists "a full array of family planning services is vital for women's health - especially for the two-thirds of American women of reproductive age who wish to avoid or postpone pregnancy"

"Nearly half of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended. And unintended pregnancies can have serious health consequences for women.

'For example, for some women with serious medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure, a pregnancy could be life-threatening. Children born from unintended pregnancies are also at greater risk of poor birth outcomes, such as congenital defects, low birth weight and prematurity.

'According to the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality, excuse me, 10 percent of infant deaths could be prevented if all pregnancies were planned.

'I want to share the story of a young woman named Katy from my home state of Illinois. Katy, like millions of women across the country, currently relies on contraception because she is pursuing her career and wants to do so without getting pregnant.

'Here's what Katy wrote:

"Birth control is important to me personally because I am a 23 year old medical student that would be distraught if I became pregnant. Don't get me wrong, I love children and dream of the day that I can become a mother, she writes, but that time isn't now.

"That time isn't when I have \$81,000 in medical school debt after just two years of medical school. That time isn't when I study for most hours of the day. That time isn't when I have no job and my only source of, quote "income" is the overpayment checks I receive for my financial aid.

"Birth control is important to be because I can't be a mother right now, but want to have the option in the future. Birth control gives me the option to retain a somewhat normal intimate life with my partner of 8 years, while still protecting my dreams of a future in medicine. That future would be extremely hard to obtain with an infant to care for," end of quote.

"Contraception has transformed our society by allowing women like Katy to take their own health and their own futures into their own hands.

"Women have the power to decide when and how many children to have, which has allowed them to pursue successful careers and enter the workforce like never before. But in the end, this is not about work versus home-life. This is about empowering women to *decide for themselves*. Birth control let's women choose their own lives' path. That's why it's vital that we protect it.

"I also want to remind opponents of contraception coverage, that contraceptions prevent abortion. Nearly half – 49 percent – of pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended. And 42 percent of unintended pregnancies end in abortion.

"Although abortion and contraception are one degree removed, it is easy to see that increased use of contraception will reduce unintended pregnancies and therefore reduce abortion rates. The data shores this up as well.

According to study published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the recent decline in pregnancy rates amongst American teens, quote:

"Appears to be following the patterns observed in other developed countries , where improved

contraception use has been the primary determinant of declining rates”

"Teen pregnancy is at a 30-year low, due in large part to increased contraception use.

"Another recent study found that California’s family-planning program, averted nearly 300,000 unintended pregnancies, 100,000 abortions, and 38,000 miscarriages.

"Finally, a Guttmacher Institute study of nation-wide family planning programs found similar results. According to Guttmacher, quote:

“Publicly funded contraceptive services and supplies help women in the U.S. avoid nearly two million unintended pregnancies each year.

“In the absence of such services – from family planning centers and from doctors serving Medicaid patients, estimated U.S. levels of unintended pregnancy, abortion and unintended birth would be nearly two-thirds higher among women overall, and nearly twice as high among poor women,” end of quote.

"There can be no denying that contraception prevents abortion. This means abortion opponents should be bolstering contraception programs not banning them. We should be able to find common ground on the issue of contraception – a basic health service already utilized by the vast majority of American women.

"I hope we can work together to expand important investments in family planning such as Title X and Medicaid, and I hope we can move forward with the new, important new rule requiring coverage of contraception, to empower women, improve health, save lives and reduce abortions.

"Mr. Speaker, I now yield back."